



*Commonwealth of Massachusetts*  
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**Testimony of Faith Behum**  
**To the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities**  
**July 14, 2015**  
**SB 85 An Act for Passage to Independence**

Good Afternoon Chairwoman Khan, Chairwoman Flanagan and Committee Members,

My name is Faith Behum and I am a Disability Policy Specialist at the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council. The Council is federally mandated to educate policy makers on both the state and federal level about the intent of legislation and its' impact on people with Developmental Disabilities. In addition, the Council works to improve the system of supports for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families by bringing together lawmakers with advocates to make sure people with developmental disabilities are included in decisions about public policy.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you on SB 85 An Act for Passage to Independence. SB 85 has the potential to positively impact individuals with developmental disabilities who have transitioned from special education services by increasing access to post-education services for this population. While attending public schools, individuals with developmental disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate education. This means that regardless of the severity of an individual's disability he or she must receive all services including in-home services that are necessary for the individual to obtain an appropriate education. When the individual turns 22 or graduates high school, this entitlement ends and the individual loses all the services he or she received through their educational program. They can apply for services through adult service agencies like the Department of Developmental Services and Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission but any services the individual receives are contingent on their eligibility and if there is enough money in the agency's budget to serve them. Once an individual turns 22, service entitlement ceases.



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When an individual graduates their educational program, nearly 100% of the time, he or she will still require services and supports to lead a full and safe life. Because of the lack of services offered to transition age youth, the parents or guardians of the individual with developmental disabilities often become full-time unpaid service providers for the individual with developmental disabilities. With no program or employment supports to assist them, it is not uncommon for many individuals with developmental disabilities to sit at home, which results in these individuals losing skills they worked so hard to develop in school-causing the previous state and federal monetary investment in their education to go to waste.

SB 85 An Act for Passage to Independence is a piece of legislation created to improve the outcomes for youth leaving the special education system. If implemented as is, employment and residential services will be made more readily available to individuals with disabilities. Specifically, DDS would be required to support a minimum of 200 persons in competitive employment and MRC would be required to provide community based supported employment to all individuals no longer served by special education. Residential services for individuals with developmental disabilities who never received family or residential supports (who are at the greatest risk for relying heavily on their families to care for them) will be further developed for this population through the Department of Developmental Services. To fund these services, the legislation suggests using a percentage of federal revenues and money from the sales of state schools. No additional budget requests would be needed to implement this legislation.

Based on the Council's analysis, we believe SB85 will have a positive impact on people with developmental disabilities if it is passed because it will promote employment and independent living opportunities for this population. We appreciate the opportunity to educate Committee members about the bill and welcome the opportunity to schedule a follow up meeting with members if additional questions arise.

Sincerely,

**Faith Behum**

Disability Policy Specialist

The Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council